



| Flash |

Military Strikes on Iran – SITREP

#25: March 18, 2026

F-2026-03-18a

Classification: TLP:CLEAR

Criticality: High

Intelligence Requirements: Geopolitics

March 18, 2026

Scope Note

*ZeroFox Intelligence is derived from a variety of sources, including—but not limited to—curated open-source accesses, vetted social media, proprietary data sources, and direct access to threat actors and groups through covert communication channels. Information relied upon to complete any report cannot always be independently verified. As such, ZeroFox applies rigorous analytic standards and tradecraft in accordance with best practices and includes caveat language and source citations to clearly identify the veracity of our Intelligence reporting and substantiate our assessments and recommendations. All sources used in this particular Intelligence product were **identified prior to 4:00 AM (EDT) on March 18, 2026**; per cyber hygiene best practices, caution is advised when clicking on any third-party links.*

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| Key Findings

- Operation Epic Fury and Iranian targeting intensified in the last 48 hours, with Iranian attacks on energy infrastructure around the Gulf notably increasing. Israeli strikes reportedly killed Iran's security chief and the head of its Basij militia in what are among the most high-profile killings of Iranian officials since the conflict began.
- Iran is allowing some passage through the Strait of Hormuz (SoH), while U.S. President Donald Trump has reiterated his desire to secure the SoH and threatened to expand strikes on Iran's Kharg Island to target its oil infrastructure. Despite both sides escalating, the Trump administration continues to maintain its commitment to a shorter war.
- The range of potential outcomes is broad, including the United States and Israel ending Operation Epic Fury while the SoH remains closed and the Iranian political-military establishment becoming more entrenched than before the war began.

Latest Details

Iran Intensifies Energy and UAE Targeting

In the last 24 hours, Iran stepped up attacks on energy infrastructure. Operations were suspended at the Shah natural gas field in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) due to a fire caused by a drone attack¹; this marks the first time an UAE upstream energy production asset has been targeted in the conflict. Previous Iranian attacks have focused on downstream energy assets that deliver energy products. Iran also targeted an Iraqi oil field in the last 24 hours.²

- While there have been repeated attacks on energy installations across the Middle East, the impacts on upstream and midstream operations—where oil is drilled and transported to refineries—have been limited. There have been shutdowns at major Gulf refineries,^{3,4,5} and backlogs are forming on the periphery of the SoH. However, those issues are more easily reconciled once the conflict ends. Refineries can resume operations within days, and shipping backlogs can be cleared.
- A drone attack temporarily shut the Fujairah port in the UAE, for the second time in three days. Fujairah port has been targeted throughout the war and represents a downstream asset.⁶

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[hXXps://www.middleeasteye\[.\]net/live-blog/live-blog-update/drone-attack-sparks-fire-uaes-shah-oil-and-gas-field](https://www.middleeasteye.net/live-blog/live-blog-update/drone-attack-sparks-fire-uaes-shah-oil-and-gas-field)

2 [hXXps://www.wsj\[.\]com/livecoverage/iran-war-us-israel-latest-news-2026/card/qd2TYUqgRMjP2ScD4ZZh](https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/iran-war-us-israel-latest-news-2026/card/qd2TYUqgRMjP2ScD4ZZh)

3

[hXXps://www.cbsnews\[.\]com/live-updates/us-iran-war-israel-supreme-leader-khamenei-funeral-day-2/#post-update-02fddbc0](https://www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/us-iran-war-israel-supreme-leader-khamenei-funeral-day-2/#post-update-02fddbc0)

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[hXXps://www.khaleejtimes\[.\]com/world/gulf/qatarenergy-stops-lng-production-after-attacks-on-ras-laffan-mesaieed-facilities](https://www.khaleejtimes.com/world/gulf/qatarenergy-stops-lng-production-after-attacks-on-ras-laffan-mesaieed-facilities)

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[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/business/energy/qatar-shuts-gas-liquefaction-will-take-weeks-restart-sources-say-2026-03-04/](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/qatar-shuts-gas-liquefaction-will-take-weeks-restart-sources-say-2026-03-04/)

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[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/business/energy/oil-loading-operations-uaes-fujairah-have-restarted-industry-source-says-2026-03-15/](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/oil-loading-operations-uaes-fujairah-have-restarted-industry-source-says-2026-03-15/)

The UAE briefly shut its airspace as it intercepted drones and missiles, marking the first full airspace closure for the country since the start of the war. The measure was lifted about two hours later.⁷

- The last two days of the war have seen the fewest number of drones and missiles fired at the UAE,⁸ which is likely a sign that Iran is running low on or trying to preserve its stockpiles. However, Iran’s success rate is notably increasing, which is very likely a sign that UAE interceptor stocks are declining.

Operation Epic Fury

Israel carried out a number of successful attacks on Iranian leadership, including those targeting the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani, and paramilitary unit leader Gholamreza Soleimani.⁹ If Larijani’s death is confirmed, he would be one of the most high-profile Iranian officials to be killed since Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on the first day of the war.

- If confirmed, Larijani’s death would be a major blow to Iran’s war effort and leadership. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) would likely exploit the loss of Larijani to consolidate even more power, which would very likely lead to a continuation of the IRGC’s hardline approach to hostilities.
- This will all but certainly further sideline more pragmatic figures within Iran’s government who are more likely to favor a diplomatic end to the war. As such, it is increasingly unlikely that the two sides will agree to a ceasefire under the current conditions.

Following the attacks, National Economic Council Director Kevin Hassett said the expectation is still for a “four-to-six week operation.” Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar

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[hXXps://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/16/united-arab-emirates-briefly-closes-airspace-israel-strikes-lebanon-and-tehran-00831119](https://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/16/united-arab-emirates-briefly-closes-airspace-israel-strikes-lebanon-and-tehran-00831119)

⁸ [hXXps://x.com/UAEEmbassyUS/status/2033588196592812371](https://x.com/UAEEmbassyUS/status/2033588196592812371)

⁹ [hXXps://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/17/israel-says-it-has-killed-ali-larjani-irans-top-security-official](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/17/israel-says-it-has-killed-ali-larjani-irans-top-security-official)

said the war is effectively “already won” but vowed to “continue till the point the mission will be completed.”¹⁰

On March 16, 2026, President Trump requested that China delay a March 31–April 2 summit with his counterpart Xi Jinping for a month so that Trump can better monitor the war.¹¹ Delaying the important summit, which is designed to stabilize the U.S.–China trading relationship after years of hefty tariffs for a specified time period of one month likely indicates that the U.S. military intends to end the conflict before the rescheduled meeting takes place or once it has made significant progress in reopening the SoH.

In the meantime, U.S. targeting is likely to continue to focus on degrading Iran’s offensive weapons capabilities, such as its missiles and drones, so that it can create the conditions necessary to ensure the continued flow of oil through the SoH.

SoH and Energy Trade

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the SoH “is only closed to our enemies, to those who carried out unjust aggression against our country and to their allies.”¹²

Iran is permitting a small number of vessels through, most of which are bound for countries with which Iran maintains relations, such as India and China. While Iran claims the SoH is open except for vessels associated with the United States and Israel, shipowners are likely wary of passing through.

- Iran’s policy will likely incentivize countries to seek ways of securing passage for some of their ships through the SoH.
- Ships that have recently made the passage have done so by sailing close to the Iranian coast, suggesting an Iranian–approved route while also signaling that Iran is tightening control of the waterway to continue leveraging economic shocks.¹³

¹⁰

[hXXps://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-03-17/iran-hits-uae-gas-field-as-trump-pushes-allies-to-help-on-hormuz](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-03-17/iran-hits-uae-gas-field-as-trump-pushes-allies-to-help-on-hormuz)

¹¹ [hXXps://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn9e0z7v3nxo](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn9e0z7v3nxo)

¹²

[hXXps://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/17/iran-blames-us-israel-for-hormuz-tensions-as-crisis-risks-energy-supplies](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/17/iran-blames-us-israel-for-hormuz-tensions-as-crisis-risks-energy-supplies)

¹³ [hXXps://safety4sea.com/pakistan-bound-tanker-completes-safe-hormuz-transit-with-ais-on/](https://safety4sea.com/pakistan-bound-tanker-completes-safe-hormuz-transit-with-ais-on/)

Iran has managed to effectively close the SoH for its adversaries while continuing to maintain its own oil trade—largely by threatening the use of force and pushing up the price of insuring a vessel transiting the strait.

- Iran has not struck a vessel in the SoH since March 12, and only 20 vessels in total have been targeted throughout the war.¹⁴

This likely demonstrates that shipowners are unwilling to transit the SoH even when there is relatively little conflict. Securing the SoH to an extent that shipowners would feel comfortable would likely require near-perfect conditions, which would very likely require a significant U.S. military escalation or gains in the military campaign that force Iran into concessions.

To this end, President Trump threatened to expand strikes on Kharg Island (Iran’s main energy terminal) to target oil infrastructure,¹⁵ following U.S. hits on the Kharg Island military sites over the weekend.¹⁶ The revenue generated from Kharg Island funds the Iranian political and military establishment led by the IRGC, and there is a roughly even chance that eliminating this source of revenue would coerce Iran into offering concessions to end the war. However, these expanded strikes would almost certainly necessitate U.S. ground forces while incentivizing Iran to escalate the conflict by increasing its targeting of Gulf energy infrastructure.

- There is a roughly even chance that initial targeting of Kharg Island was designed to limit Iran’s military capabilities to close the SoH, while signaling that the United States could escalate to target Iran’s revenue-generating oil infrastructure. As 90–95 percent of Iranian oil exports go through the island, successfully seizing it would effectively shut off the Iranian oil trade—while also likely delivering a psychological impact that would facilitate the United States and Israel ending Operation Epic Fury.

¹⁴ <https://understandingwar.org/research/middle-east/iran-update-evening-special-report-march-16-2026/>

¹⁵

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-threatens-to-knock-the-hell-out-of-kharg-island-in-impromptu-phone-call-with-pbs-news>

¹⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/16/trump-iran-kharg-island-strikes-oil-exports.html>

- Targeting the island's oil infrastructure would very likely result in an escalation across the conflict zone—including by Iran-aligned groups in Iraq and Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen, who have notably not yet entered the conflict but would likely expand the target zone for commercial ships into the Red Sea. Iran specifically listed Western and Gulf energy assets it would attack following the initial March 13 targeting of Kharg Island.¹⁷

Cyber Activity

Coordinated cyber operations targeting government infrastructure and private-sector entities continue across Israel, Iran, and other Middle Eastern countries. These activities appear to be driven primarily by pro-Iranian, pro-Palestinian, pro-Israel, anti-Iran, and pro-Russian hacktivist collectives employing a combination of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, website defacement, data exfiltration, and claimed intrusions into Industrial Control Systems (ICS).

Handala Hack Team

On March 17, 2026, pro-Palestinian hacktivist group Handal Hack Team claimed on its deep web victim leak site to have breached 50,000 classified emails and documents associated with Israel's intelligence agency (Mossad) allegedly consisting of its covert research and analytical project data.

On March 16, 2026, the group also claimed on its leak site to have compromised the personal email account of an individual that is allegedly a former Mossad deputy director for research and former Iran desk chief. The collective released more than 100,000 emails allegedly containing internal correspondence, operational discussions, and analysis related to regional security and Iran-linked activities.

- If the claims are true, there is a roughly even chance that the exposed communications reveal sensitive intelligence priorities, analytical methods, and internal assessments related to Iran and affiliated groups.
- Threat actors are likely to exfiltrate operational insights, contacts, or historical targeting patterns. In addition, Israeli intelligence personnel whose information

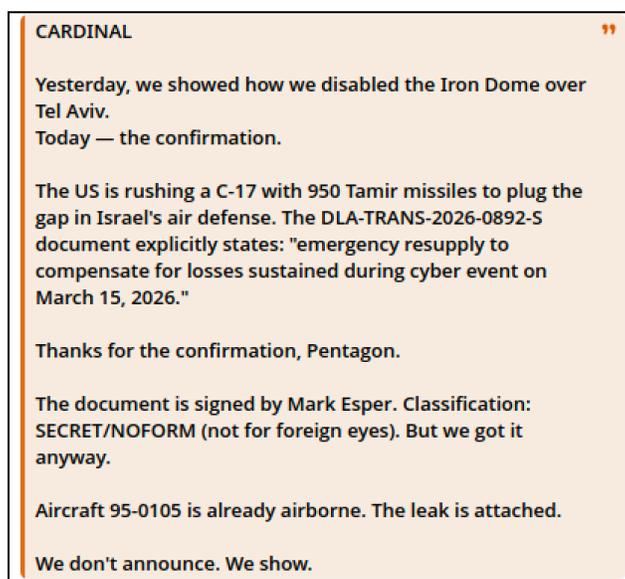
¹⁷ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/iran-adds-us-economic-assets-to-target-list-media/3855466>

was allegedly exposed in the leak are likely to face spear-phishing or social engineering attacks.

Cardinal

Pro-Russian hacktivist group Cardinal claimed responsibility for a March 15 cyber event allegedly disrupting Israel's Iron Dome systems over Tel Aviv, citing a document referencing emergency resupply of 950 Tamir interceptors via U.S. C-17 aircraft 95-0105 (DLA-TRANS-2026-0892-S).

[Analyst Note: ZeroFox previously observed a threat collective using the alias Cardinal change its alias to MONARCH; at the time of this writing, it is unclear whether the group has changed its name or if there are several entities utilizing the same aliases.]



Cardinal's Telegram post

Source: ZeroFox Intelligence

Conclusion

Economic conditions will almost certainly deteriorate while the SoH remains closed to traffic. Forcibly reopening it would almost certainly require a military escalation. Before that, Operation Epic Fury U.S. is likely looking to degrade Iran's military capabilities so that they can position sufficient forces to reopen the SoH. There is a roughly even chance of

doing so by early April, when the current oil price spikes begin spreading more permanently to other industries. Iran is therefore incentivized to protract the conflict so that the economic impacts, led by energy price shocks, force the United States and Israel to abandon Operation Epic Fury before achieving their maximalist aims of removing the Iranian political-military establishment, dissolving the Iranian nuclear weapons program and fully ending Iran's missile program and support for proxy groups abroad..

| Appendix A: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

	Red	Amber
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:RED when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.	Sources may use TLP:AMBER when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may NOT share TLP:RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.	Recipients may ONLY share TLP:AMBER information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm. Note that TLP:AMBER+STRICT restricts sharing to the organization only.
	Green	Clear
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:GREEN when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.	Sources may use TLP:CLEAR when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may share TLP:GREEN information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.	Recipients may share TLP:CLEAR information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

Appendix B: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale

All ZeroFox intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns with how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%